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ABSTRACT

In spring 1999, the Palm Beach County, Florida, Public Schools implemented an after school program designed to improve students' behavior, school attendance, and academic achievement. The program targeted 63 at-risk students in a high-needs elementary school. Students were identified as having behavioral and/or academic problems. Participants completed a 27-day program with activities designed to provide opportunities to improve reading and math skills, develop positive social skills, share recreational activities, and share art and cultural experiences. Teachers participated by monitoring attendance and providing instruction. Analysis involved data on student demographics, academic achievement, attendance, and behavior. Results indicated that students' social skills development, report card grades, standardized test scores, and attendance were all positively impacted by attendance in the program. (Contains 30 references.) (SM)

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Advocacy for All:

A 21st Century Community Learning Center for At-Risk Students

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Abstract

In the spring of 1999, the Palm Beach County, Florida, Public School District implemented an after-school program with monies received from a 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant. The goal of the program was to improve behavior, school attendance, and academic achievement. This program targeted "at-risk" students in one of the county's high-need elementary schools. This paper reports on the results of the evaluation of that program. The results indicate that social skills development, report grades, standardized test scores, and attendance were all positively impacted by attendance in the after-school program. Teachers played an important role in program success through instruction and monitoring. It is important for teachers and teacher educators to recognize the impact teachers have not only during traditional classroom hours but in programs that run after the school bell rings.

Advocacy for All:

A 21st Century Community Learning Center for At-Risk Students

Introduction

In January of 1999 the Palm Beach County, Florida, Public School District was awarded a three year 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. A major goal of this grant was to improve behavior, school attendance, and academic achievement. Based on the findings of a comprehensive, local needs assessment conducted for the school system by the Palm Beach County Health and Human Services Planning Association (1997), three schools were identified as at-risk schools. This classification was a result of the presence of three indicators: (1) low academic achievement, (2) violent incidents, and (3) alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. One of these three at-risk schools was designated to participate in a pilot program.

In the spring of 1999, a comprehensive after-school program was implemented at the pilot school. The 63 students targeted for participation in the after-school program were identified by school administrators, guidance counselors, and faculty as exhibiting low academic performance and/or aggressive behavior.

This paper reports on the results of the evaluation of the pilot program. In particular, it focuses on the results of one of the program's goals: to improve behavior, school attendance, and academic achievement. The results indicate a need for teachers and teacher educators to advocate for programs for at-risk students.

Literature Review

A review of the literature was conducted to determine the benefits of after-school programs, to identify the characteristics of effective after-school programs, and to articulate the role that teachers play in successful after-school programs.

Benefits of After-Care

Research indicates that almost all Americans feel that it is of importance to provide children with after-school programs that create a nurturing environment where they are able to develop both academic and social skills (YMCA, 1998). Children who participate in high-quality after-school programs increase their math and reading grades (Brickman, 1996; Chicago Public Schools, 1998; Gregory, 1996; Louisiana Department of Education, 1996; Posner & Vandell 1994). In addition, they show higher levels of interest and ability in reading and math since literacy development increases as a result of practice and experience in after-care programs (Clark, 1989). Children in quality after-school programs also exhibit expanded development of new skills and interests (Gregory, 1996). Participation in after-school programs improves school attendance and homework frequency and quality (Carlisi, 1996; McCormick & Tushnet, 1996; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Riley, 1994). The literature also indicates that children in high quality after-school programs improve their behavior and are better able to handle conflicts. (Carlisi, 1996; Gregory, 1996; Steinberg, Riley & Todd, 1993). Social skills development including improved interpersonal skills and the ability to cooperate with adults and peers is another benefit of quality after-school programs (Belle & Burr, 1997; Carlisi, 1996;Gregory, 1996; Terao, 1997; Steinberg, Riley & Todd, 1993). Finally, students' self-confidence grows through development of caring relationships with adults and peers in the after-school setting (McCormick & Tushnet, 1996; Steinberg, Riley & Todd, 1993).

Characteristics of High Quality After-Care Programs

The research indicates that high-quality after-school programs exhibit certain attributes. They are clear about their goals (Dept. of Education, 1998). They employ skilled and qualified staff (Vandell, 1995). They use community resources effectively including developing partnerships with law enforcement agencies (Fox & Newman, 1998). Additionally, effective programs

coordinate their curriculum with the regular school day and focus on providing a challenging curriculum in an enriching environment (Funkhouser, Fiester, O'Brien, & Weiner, 1995; Dept. of Education, 1998). Effective after-school programs meet many basic needs and support academic and social development by creating a safe and secure place for children after the bell rings. This is achieved by linking after-school activities with children's classroom learning experiences.

The Role of the Teacher

The National Study of Before and After School Programs (Seppanen, 1993) found that human relationships were an important indicator of program quality. Quality relationships were defined as: warmth and respect between teachers and children, small groups to meet students' needs, positive inter-student interactions, and team work among teachers and with parents. The notion of warmth and respect as part of quality relationships directly relates to teacher effectiveness. Characteristics of effective teachers have been defined similarly to those in Seppanen's quality relationships and include: caring. understanding, being helpful/friendly, withitness, and social insight. These human relationship factors within the area of teacher effectiveness contribute to the creation of a climate that supports learning (Agne, 1992; Gordon, 1997; Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans, 1997).

Effective teachers hold high expectations for all students, creating an environment that is bias free, instructionally effective, and thus promotes students' achievement (Arends, 1998). Teachers with high expectations assign competence to students (Arends, 1998; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995), thus helping them to develop a positive self-sense. Additionally, teacher expectations "are a vital part of motivating and effectively teaching currently low-achieving students" (Mac Iver, 1992, p. 14).

Evaluation Design

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this evaluation was an adaptation of the Tylerian Evaluation Approach, an objectives-oriented evaluation model. This approach was selected since the purpose s of the program were identified, and the focus of the evaluation was to determine if and to what extent these purposes have been met (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Tyler's model is composed of seven steps: (1) establishment of broad goals, (2) classification of goals (3) development of behavioral objectives, (4) identification of program activities, (5) selection of measurement techniques, (6) data collection, and (7) comparison of data results with objectives (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). This framework identifies discrepancies between performance and objectives. Since this was a pilot program, guided by pre-established goals, a modification of Tyler's model provided the framework for evaluating program outcomes. This modification used the following steps: (1) articulation of the broad goal, (2) restatement of program indicators as behavioral objectives, (3) identification of program activities, (4) data collection, and (5) comparison of data results with objectives. By understanding how to use evaluation findings to improve student achievement, teachers and teacher educators can become advocates for all learners.

Methodology

Using the theoretical framework outlined above, the following section addresses the five evaluative areas.

Articulation of Broad Goal

The broad goal identified in this portion of the evaluation was stipulated in the 21st Century Community Learning Center's grant as a focus for annual reporting (U.S. Department of

Education, 1998). Thus the goal of improving behavior, school attendance, and academic achievement guided the development of program activities and evaluative measurements.

Restatement of Program Indicators as Behavioral Objectives

Eight program indicators were defined in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Annual Report (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Two indicators were used to develop behavioral objectives. First, students regularly participating in the program show continuous improvement in achievement through measures such as test scores, grades, and/or teacher reports. Second, students participating in the program show improvements on measures such as school attendance and decreased disciplinary actions or other adverse behaviors.

Translating these indicators into behavioral objectives allowed for data analysis. Thus the indicators stated as objectives became

(1) Students will meet or exceed the district minimum standard on the reading portion of the CTBS.

(2) Students will meet or exceed the district minimum standard on the math portion of the CTBS.

(3) Students will increase their report card grade/grade level in Reading half a grade/grade level or more.

(4) Students will increase their report card grade/grade level in Math by half a grade/grade level or more.

(5) Total participation in the program will reflect a 90% program attendance rate.

(6) Students will demonstrate a significant decrease ($p<.05$) on the internalizing portion of the Achenbach scale.

(7) Students will demonstrate a significant decrease ($p<.05$) on the externalizing portion of the Achenbach scale.

(8) Students will show improved social competencies skills as demonstrated by significant increase ($p<.05$) in pre and post SSBS scores.

(9) Students will show improvement in their antisocial behavior as demonstrated by significant decrease ($p<.05$) in pre and post SSBS scores.

Identification of program activities

Program activities were designed to support successful implementation of the objectives. Participants completed a 27-day program (81 hours) which met five days a week between 2 P.M. and 5 P.M. each day. Program activities were designed to provide students with an opportunity to improve reading and math skills, develop positive interaction with others (social skills development), share recreational activities, and share art and cultural experiences. All of this was provided in a safe and drug-free after school environment.

Under the direction of the Safe Schools Center, a project director and certified teachers were hired to supervise the daily operations of the program. Activities designed to improve test scores and report card grades involved teachers providing math and reading assistance using materials prepared by the Safe School Center as well as materials purchased with grant money. Alternative teaching methodologies were encouraged. Guidance counselors and community agencies (e.g., Department of Parks and Recreation, Out of School Consortium) provided support and assistance with recreational and cultural activities.

Attendance was monitored by the teachers who kept a log of student attendance and followed this with phone calls to the parents of students who had missed a daily session. A social skills curriculum was designed to address student behavior. This curriculum included skill development in resiliency building, coping, anger management, and conflict resolution.

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Data collection

Quantitative data were collected on student demographics, academic achievement, (standardized test scores, report card grades), attendance, (program attendance logs), and student behavior (The Achenbach Teacher's Report Form, The School Social Behavior Scales). Additionally, demographic data were collected on participants (district reports).

Instruments

Participants' Demographics and Economics. The demographic and economic data were collected from the district's data bases by the program coordinator. Participants were identified by their student identification numbers to protect anonymity. Data were loaded into the SPSS computer program for purposes of analysis.

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The CTBS is a standardized, norm-referenced test annually administered by the school district. Since standardized test scores are often used to assess students' academic performance for local, state, and federal level comparisons (Arends, 1998; Burden & Bryd, 1999), CTBS scores were selected as one measure of academic performance. Changes were calculated as the percentage of increase or decrease in the test scores from the 1997-1998 academic year to the 1998-1999 academic year scores.

Report card grades. The second measure of participants' performance was report card grades, since they are typically used as an indicator of students' academic performance. For example, report card grades determine a student's promotion to the next grade or retention in the same grade (Burden & Bryd, 1999). Since the pilot school ran a Montessori program, all students did not receive report cards. For those students who did receive report cards, grade differences between the first and the third marking period were reported. For those students who did not receive a report card grade, increases in grade level between the first and third marking period were reported.

Attendance logs. Participants' attendance rates were calculated as the number of days attended over the number of available attendance days in the program. Measuring attendance in this way avoided penalizing participants who were late entries into the program.

The Achenbach Teacher's Report Form. The Achenbach Teacher's Report Form is an instrument typically used for identification of students' behavior problems (Achenbach, 1991). The student's classroom teacher completes the form, which includes a student profile section for anecdotal comments and a behavioral rating section. The Achenbach scores for the behavioral rating section are reported as an internalizing total and externalizing total, thus identifying the student's expression of antisocial behaviors as turned within toward his/herself (depression) or turned outwards toward others (aggressive behaviors). Participants were rated upon entry into and at the close of the program, with scores on the pre and post test measures tested for significance of change at the .05 level using the paired-samples t-Test.

The School Social Behavior Scale (SSBS). The School Social Behavior Scales (SSBS) provides a valid and reliable, standardized measure of students' school behavior (Merrel, 1993). The student's classroom teacher completes the scale, rating the student on social competence and antisocial behavior. The social competence dimension assesses interpersonal skills, self-management skills, and academic performance yielding a social competence total. Antisocial behavior is assessed via behaviors: hostile-irritable, antisocial-aggressive, and demanding-disruptive yielding an antisocial behavior total. Participants were rated upon entry into and at the close of the program, with scores on the pre and post test measures tested for significance of change at the .05 level using the paired-samples t-Test.

Comparison of data results with objectives

The following section, findings and conclusions, presents a comparison of the data analysis with the program objectives. Discrepancies are noted, suggestions for further program

development are offered, and implications for teachers and teacher education programs are then presented.

Findings and Conclusions

Demographics

There were 63 students enrolled in the pilot after-school program. Thirty-one (49%) students were in the fourth grade and 32 (51%) were in the fifth grade. There were 35 male participants (57%) and 28 female participants (44%). The school district report reflected 52 black students (83%), 7 Hispanic students (11%), and 4 white students (6%). Most of the students (58, 92%) received free or reduced; 5 (8%) did not.

Twenty-five students (40%) were reported as dropout prevention program participants. Nine students (14%) were Special Education Students (ESE) students and 4 (6%) were English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. Twenty-five students (40%) were reported as not participating in any special programs.

CTBS Scores

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) math and reading scores were analyzed by comparing scores for the past two years. Data are reported in Tables 3 and 4 as an increase in scores, a decrease in scores, or no change in scores.

Table 3 CTBS Reading Scores

	Number of Students	Percent
Increased Scores	30	59
Decreased Scores	16	31
No Change in Scores	5	10
Total	51	100
No Score Reported	12	
Total in program	63	

Table 4 CTBS Math Scores

	Number of Students	Percent
Increased Scores	33	65
Decreased Scores	15	29
No Change in Scores	3	6
Total	51	100
No Score Reported	12	
Total in program	63	

The majority of students who participated in this program had increased CTBS reading scores (59%) and increased CTBS math scores (65%). Most of the participants in this program were targeted because they scored in the bottom two quartiles on the CTBS. These initial results seem to indicate that the students who participated in the after-school program benefited from the extra help in math and reading. Unfortunately, no district minimum standards were available for either the math or reading scores to measure success in terms of the stated behavioral objectives.

Report Card Grades

Academic improvement was also measured by improvement in report cards grades between the first and third 9-week marking period. During this time, 39 students (75%) increased their math grade one grade or grade level. Decreased math grades/grade levels were found for 3 students (6%) while 10 students (19%) neither increased nor decreased their math grade/grade level. Similar findings were reported for Reading/English grades/grade levels. Increases were reported for 38 students (73%), while 4 (8%) students decreased their grade/grade level. Again, 10 students (19%) neither increased nor decreased their Reading/English Scores. The immediate effects of the daily reinforcement in math and reading skills may have been a contributing factor of this improved academic performance.

Attendance

The pilot program ran for 27 days. The average attendance rate for the 63 students in the program was 88%. Table 1 shows attendance rate (percent of days attended) by frequency.

Table 1 Attendance

Days Attended	Number of Students	Percent of Students in Program
27	14	22
26	12	19
25	10	16
24	8	13
23	4	6
22	1	2
21	3	5
20	3	5
19	3	5
17	1	2
15	1	2
14	1	2
13	1	2
11	1	2

While the 88% fell somewhat short of the 90% stated in the objective, the results of this pilot study were extremely encouraging. In addition to the high daily program attendance rate, less than 1% of the participants had excessive absences (i.e., over 10 days).

Aschenbach Teacher's Report Form

The Achenbach Teacher Report Form is used for the identification of students' behavior problems. Scores are reported as an internalized total and externalized total, which identifies the student's expression of antisocial behaviors as turned toward self or turned outward toward others. Results of paired sample t-tests found no significant change in student internalizing and externalizing behavior at the completion of the program. Program duration may have played a part in the failure to see significant reduction in pilot participants internalizing or externalizing behaviors.

SSBS Results

A second measure of program effectiveness utilized in this study was the SSBS, a valid and reliable instrument that uses two scales to evaluate students' social competency skills and antisocial behaviors. Each scale is broken into sub-scales.

Data analysis using a paired sample t-test found a positive statistical significance ($p<.05$) in the following areas: Total pre/post social competency skills ($p = .001$), Interpersonal skills ($p = .001$) and Self-management skills ($p = .049$). Table 2 shows both of the scales and the sub-scales, the mean scores for the pre- and post- test and p value. This data represents 44 out of the 63 program participants who had both pre- and post-test scores.

Table 2 SBSS Results

SBSS Category	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Social Competency.- Pre	104.55	
Total Social Competency.- Post	114.07	.0001*
Interpersonal Skills – Pre	42.32	
Interpersonal Skills – Post	48.23	.0001*
Self-management Skills – Pre	34.68	
Self-management Skills – Post	36.61	.049*
Academic Skills – Pre	27.50	
Academic Skills – Post	31.50	.070
Total Anti-social Behavior – Pre	64.89	
Total Anti-social Behavior – Post	65.15	.906
Hostile-irritability – Pre	29.77	
Hostile-irritability – Post	30.39	.627
Anti-social aggressive – Pre	17.89	
Anti-social aggressive – Post	18.07	.815
Demanding-disruptive – Pre	17.52	
Demanding-disruptive – Post	16.73	.306

* $p<.05$

It appears that the Social Competency Skills of these students have improved overall, while the Anti-Social Behavior has made no significant shift. These data are representative of a 6 week pilot program. Within that limited time, frame it is encouraging to see the positive shift in Social Competency Skills. However, the lack of shift in Anti-Social Behavior should not be

taken to indicate that the program is ineffective in this area. Research has found that it takes a much longer period of time to modify anti-social behaviors. As is evidenced by the decrease in the demanding-disruptive mean scores, there has been some progress in this area.

CTBS scores, report card grades, attendance rates, and SSBS results, all show positive growth on the part of these students. While this is early data, it appears that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program has the potential to positively impact the academic and social lives of the students who it reaches.

Implications for Teachers and Teacher Educators

Implications for teachers and teacher educators can be drawn from the literature on teacher effectiveness. One of the true success stories of this program is the high attendance rate. Teachers were responsible for tracking attendance and making follow-up calls to the parents. This was an important element that contributed to the success of the pilot programs. The literature indicates that regular attendance is linked to academic success in remedial programs (Bender, Giovanis, & Mazzoni, 1994). Both standardized test scores and report card grades/grade level improvement reflected this.

After-school teachers worked with the classroom teachers to link the program activities with classroom activities. They developed relationships with parents, students, administrators, and support staff to create a climate that supported learning (Agne, 1992;Gordon, 1997; Wubbels, Levy, & Brekelmans, 1997). As a new generation of teachers enters the nation's classrooms, it is important to recognize the role they will play in children's success both during the school day and after the bell rings.

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